

IV. About the Kingdom

LESSON: Matt. 4. 17; Luke 17. 20, 21; John 3. 3.
SUGGESTED HYMNS: 7, 19, 47, 100, 155, 178, 184, 194, 196.

The idea of the Kingdom was familiar to the Jews. They looked forward to the coming of the Kingdom. Jesus came into the world to establish the Kingdom, that is, the Kingdom which the Jews expected. His text was, "The Kingdom of God is at hand." (Mark 1: 15). The Jewish idea of the Kingdom was not perfect, in some respects it was erratic. It was necessary for Jesus to present the true idea of the Kingdom.

The Jewish Idea of the Kingdom.—Matt. 20. 1; Luke 24. 21; Acts 1. 6. They thought that the Kingdom which the Messiah would establish would be an earthly kingdom like unto the kingdom over which David and Solomon reigned; that it would have its capital at Jerusalem; and that the reign of the Messiah in worldly power would be irresistible, so that the enemies of Israel would be overcome; and then his reign would gradually extend to all the earth and continue as long as the sun and moon endure. In this material view of the Kingdom the Jews were wrong. Even the disciples found it difficult to get away from this materialism. They were right however in believing that when the Messiah should come he would be a King, and that his rule would be in righteousness, and that his righteous rule would extend to all the earth.

The spiritual Nature of the Kingdom.—Matt. 8. 11, 12; 11. 28; John 18. 38; Luke 17. 20, 21. Jesus explained that his kingdom was not of the world. It would not therefore manifest itself with that pomp and show which characterize earthly kingdoms. In this sense his kingdom would not be open to the observation of men. It is a spiritual kingdom whose blessings will not consist in wealth or power or luxury, but in rest and in fellowship with God. The members of this kingdom are blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places 'in Christ'" (Eph. 1. 3). Being a spiritual kingdom its privileges are not hereditary, and its members are not confined to any one country or race but shall be found in the east and in the west and in every land and among every people.

The Law of the Kingdom is the Law of Love.—Matt. 22. 34-40; 20. 26-28. The members of this kingdom are not governed by a power from without, like the power of the sword, but by a power from within, that is, the power of love. Its members are not forced into subjection, nor coerced into service. Their obedience is a willing obedience, and their service is a service of love. Their love is manifested in service to God and to men. Service is the essence of love. "Love is the communication of self to others."

Conditions of membership in the Kingdom.—Matt. 5. 3; Mark 1. 15; 10. 15; John 3. 3. Membership in this kingdom is not hereditary (Matt. 8. 12), and in this respect it differs from earthly kingdoms. It is a spiritual kingdom the condition of membership must be of a spiritual kind. They must be voluntarily accepted, and may be summed up in the idea of a whole hearted self-surrender to God. This involves repentance, faith, conversion, humility, childlikeness, a new birth. Can you define each of these conditions, and support them by a passage of scripture? Study your catechism, it will help you here.

The Gradual Growth of the Kingdom.—Mark 26. 29. When Jesus began his ministry he announced that the kingdom of God was at hand. But while the kingdom of God was already come, it was not yet come in all its fulness. The rule of God

on earth was commenced, but it was not then and is not now perfected. Only gradually are the principles of the kingdom being incorporated into the lives of men and nations. The history of Christianity shows that wonderful progress has been made in the extension of the kingdom of God. But the world is not all christian yet. All christians, so-called are not real christians, for all are not governed by love. All do not practice in their lives the principles of Jesus. All have not got entirely rid of the element of selfishness. The whole lump of mankind will not be leavened with the leaven of Christianity until everywhere, individuals, companies, corporations, and nations learn to eradicate selfishness, and allow love to have supreme sway in their lives. But the Kingdom of God is surely though gradually coming, and we believe in these days is coming with greater power and speed, one evidence of which is seen in the quickened missionary spirit of the present time.

The Kingdom is Destined to be World-wide.—Luke 13. 29, 31. Its rule will ex-

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tend to men of every clime and of every race. Already it has members in every land. Fiji has become christian; Korea is turning unto the Lord; a million people in Japan, it is said, are dominated by the principles of Jesus Christ, while only a few of them are professing christians; China is stretching out her hands for help; and we believe that the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord, in answer to the prayer which we all offer, "Thy kingdom come."

The Blessedness of the Kingdom.—Matt. 6. 33; 13. 44-46; Luke 11. 20. Its members are to enjoy supreme blessedness. Their highest and deepest needs will be met. In it the weary shall find rest, the hunger shall find salvation, and man shall find God. It is worth our while to seek this kingdom first, in preference to all other things. It is worth our while to sacrifice everything, to sell all that we have, if so we may obtain the kingdom.

Prayer for the Kingdom.—Matt. 6. 10. Jesus taught men to pray for the coming of the kingdom. Are we sincere when we offer the Lord's prayer? Do we really

desire his kingdom to come? We pray often for ourselves. How much time do we spend in praying for others? Are we carrying out the command of our grand father to pray for the coming of his kingdom? Do we prove our sincerity by doing our best to advance the interests of his kingdom?"

SELECTED READINGS.

"It is not enough that we simply pray 'Thy Kingdom Come!' We must also work in the line of our prayer. For as faith without works is dead, so also is prayer without deed. In the prayer 'Thy Kingdom Come,' lies the vow to consecrate ourselves to the Missionary service . . . It is only as the Kingdom of Heaven is in us now that we shall be in the Kingdom of Heaven in the day when God shall be All in All."—G. D. Boardman, D.D.

"In reflecting upon this great subject of Jesus' preaching, the Kingdom of God, we see it to be wonderful, high, noble, and inspiring. It is so, because it is so grandly hopeful for the future of man. It brings into view a 'regeneration' or new-making of men, of society, and indeed of all things. Jesus sees, as none ever saw the strength of the evils by which men are beset; yet still he teaches a Kingdom with powers of Divine grace at work in it so great that it shall prevail over sin, sorrow, and death in a glorious manner. His great subject, is not a soul's salvation, but that of a kingdom of souls. It is more than a man's own good, which, by itself, is not the highest blessing. It is a world-wide community of good; it is 'Joy in widest commonality spread!' They shall come from the East and West and from the North and South, and shall sit down in the Kingdom of God!"—James Robertson, D. D.

"Jesus adopted the popular phrase—Kingdom of God, or Kingdom of Heaven—but put upon it a spiritual meaning. He indicated by it 'that perfect order of things which He was about to establish, in which all those of every nation who should believe in Him were to be gathered together into one society, dedicated and intimately united to God, and made partakers of eternal salvation!' As thus understood the Kingdom is sometimes spoken of as actually present, but more frequently as a future goal to be fully realized at the coming again of Christ. He taught that so far as conditions of entrance were concerned, Jews and Gentiles stood on the same ground, and that no one, Jew or Gentile, could enter except through a new spiritual birth. Matthew almost uniformly calls this spiritual realm the 'Kingdom of Heaven,' perhaps to indicate that its ideal home is in Heaven. Mark and Luke call it the 'Kingdom of God!'"—Thayer, in E. D.

The Mark of Growth

"I remember," says the Rev. J. D. Jones, "in a certain home in which I was a guest, being shown a door on which the heights of the various members of the family were marked. And not only the heights of the various members, but also the various heights of the individual members at different ages. Here was a mark, for instance: 'Charles, at eight years of age.' And a little above it: 'Charles, at nine.' So that door became to the members of that household a kind of register of growth."

"I am far from suggesting that we can use a foot-rule, so to speak, to measure spiritual growth. But this I will say: The Christian, looking back, say, over twelve months, ought to be able to note two things. One is, that he has more heartily and serving Christ more devotedly than we did a year ago?"

"If you would be a fisher of men, the Bread of Life must be your bait."